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NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

A Hoosier Mentors a Roomful of Doves

BY VJOHNSON – SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

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By Lisa Johnson, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

A pediatric dentist from the U.S Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery visited with a group of high school students on Sept. 9 during Baltimore Navy Week.

The dentist, Rear Adm. Elaine C. Wagner, deputy chief, Wounded, Ill, and Injured, and graduate of Indiana University, visited Western High School with the purpose of receiving a brief demonstration from the school's award-winning all-girl's robotics team, the RoboDoves.

The RoboDoves are young innovators who solve real-world engineering problems through collaboration and teamwork. They build robots, large and small. The instructor's mission is to develop creative, resilient and sufficient women who will confidently pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Upon arrival to the school, the RoboDoves demonstrated their robot for the admiral and she was visually impressed.

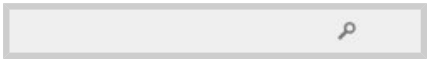
"Wow! That was amazing!" said Wagner. "I could never have imagined doing something like this when I was in high school."

After watching the team demonstrate the robots for a few moments, Wagner decided to try it for herself, with a little assistance.



"The best part of the visit for me was teaching Rear Adm. Wagner to control the robot," said Dania Q. Allgood, a Western High School senior and member of the RoboDoves Robotics team. "It was exciting to be the teenager who was teaching her. It was like having Barack Obama come up to me and say, "Ms. Dania Allgood-I need your help!"

This may be the first time someone has compared Wagner to the president, but that simply speaks volumes of how



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appreciative the students were.

“When my coach, Ms. Heather Romney, told me that Rear Adm. Wagner would be visiting the team, I was not expecting the visit to be the way that it turned out to be,” said Allgood, “I originally thought that [she] was coming in to just tell us about herself, but she wanted to hear about our views, our perspectives and about our passions.”

After the demonstration, Wagner sat the young ladies down at their classroom workbench for an impromptu discussion.



“I rarely get opportunities like this,” said Wagner. “I was thrilled to be able to sit and talk to these wonderful young ladies about their lives, their aspirations and to answer their questions.”

The students, most of whom had no military interaction or knowledge, were thrilled to engage Wagner about her career, her life and even her struggles.

“Her first job was as a babysitter,” said Sharhonda Whitfield, Western High senior and member of the RoboDoves Robotics team. “I never would’ve thought that by looking at her.”

Wagner explained to the team that she’s not the same person now that she was at their age.

“Before I joined the military, I was shy and insecure,” said Wagner. “At that time there were very few women dentist, and even fewer pediatric dentists.”

Wagner continued her discussion by telling the ladies to always believe in themselves and reminded them that they could each do whatever they desire in life.

“I didn’t want to talk to them about only careers in Navy Medicine, but I wanted to get them thinking about becoming the next researcher, the next business owner or perhaps even an admiral,” said Wagner. “I wanted them to realize that their possibilities are endless.”

Heather Romney, who has been the robotics coach for a number of years, says that she couldn’t have been happier to host the admiral for a visit during Baltimore Navy Week.

“The young women were so impressed by her experiences and her position, of course, but were absolutely won over by the fact that she was so approachable,” said Romney.

Wagner’s presence, as well as her words left a lasting impression on the students.

“I felt honored that someone who holds a high position within our armed forces came in and talked to me,” said Allgood “Rear Adm. Wagner is a determined, hard-working, passionate, intelligent person and one of the most inspirational role models a person could meet.”

According to their coach, Wagner’s visit was exactly what they needed and she was glad it happened.

“I can’t wait to hear bits of Rear Adm. Wagner’s advice spill out throughout the school year and build season,” said Romney. “Her message that the students should believe in themselves, that respect earns respect, and that students should surround themselves with those who want to succeed and see them succeed were spot on and absolutely relevant to our students at this time in their lives.”

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Western High School is the oldest public all-girls high school in the U.S Founded in 1844, this college-preparatory high school serving young women in the Baltimore area challenges students to be intelligent, insightful, and involved in the world around them. It fosters the development of school and community leadership among its students.



About vjohnson